

The Edna Ryan Awards

A celebration of a political life
and an affirmation of feminist activists



the first five years
1998 - 2002

researched and written by
Roberta Burke
July 2002

CONTENTS	page
The Origin of the Awards	1
The 1998 EDNAs 1998 Flyer, Booking and Nomination Form	5
The 1999 EDNAs 1999 Flyer, Booking and Nomination Form	8
The 2000 EDNAs 2000 Flyer, Booking and Nomination Form	12
The 2001 EDNAs 2001 Flyer, Booking and Nomination Form	15
The 2002 EDNAs 2002 Flyer, Booking and Nomination Form	19
APPENDIX 1	
Composite List of Awards	23

THE ORIGIN OF THE AWARDS

“So we are setting up the EDNAs”

The purpose in writing up this record of the annual Edna Ryan Awards is to put on record how this wonderful and entirely appropriate memorial to Edna originated, as well as to document how the Awards evolved over the course of the first five years.

It is not easy to say unequivocally where, when, or with whom the idea began. I was hoping to find in the minutes of a meeting, or a report in a newsletter, a suggestion from a particular woman or group of women that the Women’s Electoral Lobby (NSW)¹ establish the EDNA Awards to “... support the interests that Edna championed.” But such clear evidence could not be found. Unfortunately, the minutes of the WEL Administration Committee say nothing of significance on the subject, as most of the work was done outside the Committee. There is in the file a printed programme indicating that at the inaugural Awards event in 1998, Eva Cox is to give an Introduction to the Awards, including “how the EDNAs came about”, but there is no record of what she said.

So, information has been gathered from issues of *WEL-Informed* (WEL’s newsletter), from the recordings of the 2001 and 2002 events video-taped by Jan Wood, from minutes of WEL General Meetings, from files relating to the Awards kept by WEL Treasurer Anne Barber and – where there was no factual evidence – from what the women who were involved can remember.

Edna Ryan died in Canberra on 19 February 1997, and the first Awards function was held on 1 May 1998. Early ideas by WEL for an annual memorial lunch developed over this fifteen month period into the EDNA Awards, an annual event “... to recognise feminist activities by women who are prepared to make their lives political”. Chronologically it happened like this:

WEL-Informed, Issue 275 February 1997 featured a cover photograph of Edna, and tributes to her from Eva Cox, Elizabeth Evatt, Wendy McCarthy, Joan Bielski, Dorothy Simons, June Williams, Juliet Richter and Suzanne Marks. On 5 March 1997, an International Women’s Day lunch was held at Parliament House, Sydney organised by the then WEL Convenor Jane Gardiner. Clearly this function could not have been planned as a memorial to Edna, but later it assumed this status.²

Minutes of the WEL General Meeting of 6 April 1997 record an agreement in principle that there should be an annual lunch to honour Edna’s memory, and a standing committee responsible for its organisation. Other than calls for volunteers (in both the July and November newsletters), there is nothing specific about the memorial in the minutes or the newsletters until the WEL General Meeting of 7 December 1997.

¹ hereafter referred to as ‘WEL’.

² *WEL-Informed*, Issue 284 November 1997 reports that the “inaugural Edna Ryan Memorial Lunch was held in March this year” (p5).

At this meeting Anne Barber agreed to head a committee to organise a memorial lunch in February, the anniversary of Edna's death; the meeting discussed Parliament House as a likely venue, and considered possible speakers. It was suggested that as Eva Cox knew the Ryan family, she seek their approval before proceeding further. Between this 7 December meeting and January/February 1998 when a WEL sub-group met to further the plans, the concept changed significantly.

Meanwhile, on 14 December 1997, the anniversary of Edna's birthday, Cathy Cole (who was not a WEL member) had organised a lunch for Edna's friends, colleagues and family members at Parliament House. Cathy reports that at that function various people spoke, including Eva who suggested that an annual event be organised as a memorial to Edna which was inclusive of all women and which would celebrate the work she did. It should be, she thought, something more consequential than an annual lunch or a memorial lecture.

In collecting information for this history, I contacted (in person, or by phone or email) most of the women involved in the early planning of a memorial to Edna and – while some memories were vague – the majority recall that it was Eva who first proposed the idea of an award ceremony. Significantly, no other woman or group claims the idea.

Anne remembers wanting “a feminist celebration, something like the annual Mary Owen dinner held in Melbourne”; Eva remembers wanting “something positive, stirred partly by the fun at the ‘Ernies’³ but also by the success of Mardi Gras as a celebration.” There is no documentation to establish exactly what happened, yet it seems reasonable to conclude that during the conversations Anne remembers having with Eva during this period, the idea of the EDNAs was developed and became a reality.

In the file there is a slip of paper noting dates of two planning meetings, the first on 19 January 1998, when Anne Barber, June McGowan, Brenda Padgett and Juliet Richter were present; the second planned for 2 February “with Eva, Fran, Juliet and Anne”. It is in notes of these meetings⁴ that the first written reference to “Awards parallel to the ‘Ernies’ but to celebrate women’s achievements ...” can be found. The notes record that the purpose was to discuss what shape the memorial event would take; it was agreed to hold an annual 2 hour event on a Friday evening in early May to be held at a fixed venue each year close to public transport; the Sydney Town Hall and Government House were being considered as a venue; the women pondered whether or not to invite men to attend; the possibility of a guest speaker was canvassed along with mounting a display of Edna's potholders; and stalls would be permitted if requested. The meeting(s) discussed appropriate Award categories, with the most favoured name for the Awards being the ‘EDNAs’.

The minutes of WEL General Meeting on 1 February record that Anne Barber and Fran Wilde would take responsibility for arranging an Edna Ryan memorial function, with the assistance of Juliet Richter and Eva Cox. Anne

³ The Annual ‘Ernie’ Awards, organised by Meredith Burgmann, given for specific sexist remarks made during the year, and named after the former secretary of the AWU (Ernie Ecob). *WEL-Informed*, Issue 282 September 1997, featured the 5th Annual ‘Ernies’.

⁴ It is unclear if the second meeting actually took place, or whether the notes on the file cover one or both meetings.

conveyed what had been discussed at the planning meeting(s) and asked for comment. The minutes state that “The meeting gave approval for the sub-group to make decisions on price and venue ...”. This is closest I could find to a record of WEL officially agreeing to sponsor the Edna Ryan Awards.

To summarise, it is clear that the idea of a memorial to Edna, a long time WEL member, was considered by WEL as early as March 1997. The initial concept of a memorial lunch changed and developed during that year. Influenced by Eva’s notion of an event which would celebrate Edna’s work, and inspired by Meredith Burgmann’s ‘Ernies’, it seems reasonable to surmise (knowing that women often share and develop each other’s ideas) that after discussion and consideration of various options, the memorial finally emerged as a late evening function to annually award the EDNAs to those women “who make a feminist difference” – as Edna did – with WEL hosting the event, and Anne undertaking responsibility for its organisation from the outset.

“So we are setting up the EDNAs”

The February 1998 issue of *WEL-Informed* gave advance notice of the Awards, together with some background information on Edna, and some detail of proposed categories (already increased from the original four), lobbyist, humour, media, arts, grand stirrer, etc.

“Edna Ryan lived for 92 years and made the most of them, as a political activist, as a friend, mentor, mother, sister, comrade and a delighted participant in social and cultural events. When she died last year, many of us who had loved her, worked with her and enjoyed her company wanted to set up an event she would have enjoyed, to celebrate, not only her own life but also what determined women can achieve.

“So we are setting up the Ednas, to be awarded at an annual evening to recognise feminist activities by women who are prepared to make their lives political ... The awards are not so much for standard achievements, but for women who have made feminist differences. They are designed not only to support the interests that Edna championed but also to show the fun and humour that she enjoyed.”

p23, *WEL-Informed*, Issue 286 February 1998

These words are mainly Eva’s and they also appeared on the 1998 flyer (produced by Anne and Jane Gardiner) promoting the inaugural Edna Ryan Awards. Booking and nomination form was to be included in the March newsletter.

Minutes of the WEL General Meeting of 1 March 1998 confirm the date of 1 May for the event and record that “Eva Cox [is] to play a major role”⁵. The meeting felt there should be an “emphasis on getting males to attend” and resolved to include an article and leaflet promoting the function in the April newsletter. (This did not eventuate.)

The WEL General Meeting of 5 April 1998 named Anne Barber, Judith Steanes and Diane Goldrick as members of the Edna Awards selection committee; it also considered whether women who were not members of WEL could be

⁵ 1 May seemed appropriate because of Edna’s union history and radical stance.

asked to be on the committee. This would avoid the situation where WEL might be compromised in awarding EDNAs to its own members. A letter in the file dated 15 April records that Eva suggested Bobbie Burke, Phyl Pollard, Annie Bickford, Ros Day and Cathy Cole be invited to form the panel. This proposal was acted on, and it was this group of Edna's friends (none of whom were current WEL members) who selected the EDNA recipients for the first four years. They were charged with the task of choosing whom they thought Edna would have chosen.

WEL-Informed, Issue 289, May 1998, pp4-8 has a *Diary of the Inaugural Edna Ryan Awards* written by Anne Barber.

THE 1998 EDNAS

“What a tribute to the energy and vision of our dear Edna!”

Senator Margaret Reynolds

The inaugural EDNA Ryan Awards were presented at an event held in the UTS Design and Architecture Building Cafeteria in Harris Street, Sydney, on 1 May 1998. The promotional flyer, prepared and printed by WEL, advised that the event would run from 6.30 until 10pm, and suggested that people dress in the suffragette colours of purple, green and white. The cost was \$35, \$25 concession, including ‘up-market’ finger food, with a cash bar operating. The flyer included a booking form, a very brief and non-specific form for nomination – though it did request “details of actions taken which led to the nomination” – and a graphic by Vivienne Jones, which eventually became the EDNAs logo. Closing date for nominations was 17 April, just two weeks before the Awards night.

The eight categories listed on the flyer were:

Government (local, state or federal)

one who has promoted feminist interests in the political sphere

Workforce

one who has defended the rights of women workers

Lobbyist

one who has persisted and not been deterred by the male system

Media and the Arts

one who has consistently promoted women’s interests

Humour

one who has, through humour, supported or promoted women’s interests

Young Woman

a young feminist who has consistently promoted women’s interests

Political Potholder

a special award for a decorated useful domestic implement that has a political message e.g. a potholder

The Grand Stirrer

one who has incited others to challenge the status quo

The ‘Political Potholder’ category was in memory of the wonderful potholders Edna had made for friends and family, most of which were especially decorated to suit the recipient, many flaunting an embroidered political slogan – IDEAS ARE WEAPONS was one, UNIONS ARE FOR WOMEN another. Self nominations were acceptable, as were categories other than those listed. The suggested group of Edna’s friends agreed to do the selecting (though Annie Bickford could not be contacted for the 1998 event).

The panel arranged two meeting dates to consider the thirty-one individual nominations which can be identified from the file (many forms contained the name only of multiple nominees); many nominations were received with no

back-up information regarding the nominee and, as some were not known to the panel, they could not be considered. It was resolved to have a more detailed nomination form in the following year.

Some nominations were received after the closing date, and could not be considered. A letter from WEL was sent to these women (one of whom replied saying she 'didn't have a clue' that she had been nominated) explaining the time constraints, and suggesting that the nomination be put forward in 1999 – unfortunately, this was not followed up.

The UTS Cafeteria was decked with purple balloons and, as was to become the custom, photographs of Edna were on display, an attendance sheet for signing in purple ink was provided, as well as name tags, and raffle tickets were sold.

At 6.30 pm the bar was open and food was served, Jane Gardiner welcomed everyone and the Solidarity Choir sang *The Union Maid* and *Don't Be Too Polite Girls*. Following this Eva Cox told of how the 'EDNAs' came about⁶, Juliet Richter made a special plea for donations to support the MUA (then involved in an industrial dispute), and the women on the selection panel were acknowledged. Three WEL members, Sarah Maddison, Ming Yu Hah and Kathleen Swinbourne then began the presentation of the following awards:

Government	Ann Symonds
Workforce	Sharon Tobin
Lobbyist	Juliet Richter
Media	Sheryl Bagwell
Arts	Peg Hewett
Humour	Meredith Burgmann
Young Woman	Mischa Schubert
Battlers	Julie Compton & Jenny Taylor
Political Potholder	Marlene Arditto - for an 'Activist's Ready Kit'
Grand Stirrer	Eva Cox

Ann, Meredith, Mischa and the 'Battlers' Julie and Jenny were not at the event: Ann came the following year to receive her EDNA; Meredith's was presented to her in her Parliament House Office; Mischa's at a 'Women into Politics' event.

In supporting her nomination of Eva Cox for Grand Stirrer, [then] Senator Margaret Reynolds said that Eva had "fretted and fumed" for women for more than 30 years, "refusing to be cajoled into compromise ...".

The Activist's Ready Kit from the 'Gourmet Recipe File' of Marlene Arditto is an intriguing piece of craftwork which enables the activist to 'buttonhole a politician' and, if possible 'open a can of worms'. The original is held in the WEL 1998 EDNA files. No other Political Potholder award has since been given, and from 1998-2002 only one other nomination has been received in this challenging category, which was dropped in 2002.

As the 1998 form invited nominators to create their own category if the suggested ones did not suit, Liz Mackie, Outreach Co-ordinator at the Miller College of

⁶ as reported earlier, no record exists of what she said.

TAFE took up the suggestion – nominating Julie and Jenny for a Battlers Award as mature-aged female apprentices in a non-traditional trade for “... surviving on apprentice wages while bringing up a family”. Their Battling EDNAs were presented to them at home, and *WEL-Informed* Issue 294 October 1998, pp9-10 carries an interview with both women. They later graduated from the Work Opportunities for Women (WOW) Electrical Course. Liz wrote that both were “thrilled” to receive the Award, and that she hoped the Battler category would be included every year (and it has been).

In this first year the panel’s brief was to choose just one woman for each award; from the beginning this presented some difficulties, as so many of the nominees warranted an Award. There was a suggestion that the nominations be displayed at the venue. After consideration this was rejected because the panel was unwilling to have the EDNAs seen as a competition with one woman emerging as ‘winner’. It also seemed advisable to avoid any subsequent discussion as to who should or should not have been given an award.

Raffle tickets were sold, the prizes had been sought by WEL member Anna Logan and willingly donated by Jeannette McHugh, Sonia Laverty, Patricia Forsythe, Anna Booth, Caroline Alcorso, and the Belvoir Street, Stables, Ensemble, Marian Street, Pilgrim and Sydney Theatre companies.

Approximately 140 people attended the event, and the evening was considered a great success (notwithstanding the fact that as the food was served before the presentations, those arriving late got very little to eat). There was no doubt that there would be an Edna Ryan Awards night in 1999.

Anne Barber’s *Diary of the Inaugural Edna Ryan Awards*, (*WEL-Informed*, Issue 289, May 1998) concludes:

“The enthusiasm of the evening, the celebration of the work of feminist women, the pleasure and the purple balloons went home with us on that very damp evening and hopefully will provide an umbrella for the next twelve months to keep our spirits up when we are wearied at the thought of what has still to be changed.”

A media release announcing the awarding of the inaugural EDNAs issued by WEL resulted in interviews on Radio National, Triple M, 2XXX (Canberra) and 2ACER.

THE 1999 EDNAS

“... anyone who receives an EDNA has been supported by so many other women who also become part of the Award.”

Gail Hewison, Arts EDNA, 1999

In late November 1998 Anne Barber had begun thinking about the 1999 EDNAs, checking with other women's groups for clear dates, and seeking an early committee meeting. Eva Cox, Bobbie Burke and Fran Wilde met with Anne on 12 December (due to other commitments Juliet Richter was not involved).

Much was decided at this meeting: to confer with the caterers to ensure that sufficient food was provided; to charge a small amount per person above the catering cost, to provide funds for WEL; that the selection panel would remain as in 1998 for continuity, and Bobbie agreed to act as convenor. The awards would be held on Friday 30 April, and Eva would again book the UTS Cafeteria (at no cost). Closing date for nominations would be absolutely adhered to, Anne would speak to artist Vivienne Jones to seek permission for her graphic to appear on all future flyers and to become the EDNAs logo (in May 2000 Vivienne assigned the copyright to WEL), and Anna Logan again agreed to seek prizes for a raffle.

The group met again in January to discuss, rework and settle on final wording for the promotional flyer and nomination form. Bobbie undertook to do the layout and final artwork.

The form and content of the flyer was redesigned, with much of the language again attesting to Eva's skill with words. It reminded people that “the EDNAs are not only awards for long service (young women are also eligible for nomination) or for those who are well-known. They are for all the troublemakers, the stirrers, the battlers, and for those who show extraordinary commitment and determination.”

It particularly asked that nominees be comfortable with being called feminist, and that they live and work in NSW or the ACT, where Edna lived and worked. The geographic limitation was thought desirable to avoid potential difficulties in managing the selection process, and hopefully to make it possible for nominees to come to the event. It was thought that other WEL groups could be encouraged to take up the idea, and run their own version of the EDNAs, to celebrate the life and work of a woman from their State. The idea had already spread to WEL Tasmania, who wrote in March 1999 acknowledging that “the best form of compliment is to copy” and asking for information on organisational matters, as they wanted to run an EDNA-type event in Tasmania.

The 'Young Woman' category was dropped, as it was felt that young women could be eligible for most of the categories; 'Lobbyist' was changed to 'Community Activist'. New categories appearing were 'Mentoring' and 'Battling' with a separate category now for 'Arts' and 'Media'. In 1999 the ten Awards to be given were:

Workforce	for improving conditions for women workers
Government	for feminist activity in the political sphere
Community Activism	for feminist activity in the community
Arts	for creative feminism
Media	for consistent promotion of women's interests in the media
Humour	for using wit to promote women's interests
Mentoring	for sharing knowledge and ideas generously with other women
Battling	for making it against the odds
Political Potholder	for an idea for a political implement
The Grand Stirer	for inciting others to challenge the status quo

The nomination form was also redesigned and now on a separate sheet. After the difficulties experienced in 1998, the form now requested detailed information on the nominee, including the way in which her general contribution related to feminism. It also asked for contact details of the nominator and a seconder, in case the selection panel needed some clarification. It was stressed that the closing date for nominations was 31 March (four weeks before the Awards night).

One woman found this form "somewhat intimidating", and wrote that she wished to nominate persons "who should need neither seconder nor introduction". However, the selection panel confirmed that as a nominee may not be known to them, she had no chance of being equally considered if details were not provided.

Again the panel arranged two meeting dates to consider the eighteen individual nominations; six were received without supporting documentation and were regarded as ineligible; in the interests of impartiality/fairness the panel maintained that all nominations must provide relevant information on the nominee. They felt free to award an EDNA in a category not specified by the nominator, after checking that such an Award was acceptable to the nominator.

The 2nd Annual EDNA Awards were presented on Friday 30 April 1999, at the UTS venue in Broadway, the cost this time was \$25/\$15 concession with less labour-intensive food being served, and again a cash bar operating. Helium-filled purple balloons filled the room. The time was 6.00 - 8.30 pm, with food served after the presentations. Bookings were late coming in (as seems usual with women's events), a week before the event there were only three bookings! Reminders were sent out through <ausfem-polnet>, there was a ring-around of WEL members, those who had attended last year, and an email mail-out of NGOs.

The following EDNAs were awarded:

Gail Hewison	Arts
Noreen Hewett	Battling
Jane Gardiner	Media
Helen McDermot	Workforce
Cathy Bloch	Mentoring
Kate Lavender	Community Activism
Joan Bielski	Grand Stirrer

The initiator of Women into Politics, Joan Bielski, had many advocates, both this year and last, whose comments included: “how many women Joan has been responsible for guiding”; “she always has an original idea for promoting the cause”; “takes a great delight in providing a feminist critique of just about any issue of importance to women”.

The panel agreed with Kate Lavender’s nominators who felt it was “timely for a feminist lesbian who has worked in many and various aspects of the community, who has unflinchingly promoted feminist thought and action and the inclusion of lesbians, to be recognised by her sisters.”

Gail Hewison, Arts EDNA recipient, wrote later that she “felt very honoured to be recognised... [and] as several women said on the night, “anyone who receives an EDNA has been supported by so many other women who also become part of the Award.”

Not all award winners were present at the 1998 Awards, and the organising committee had undertaken to contact the appropriate nominators and encourage them to bring their nominee along to the 1999 event. This year only Kate was unable to be present, and her Award was accepted by her nominator.

Once again the panel confronted the problem of choosing just one woman in each category. To affirm that to be nominated was itself acknowledgement of notable feminist activity, it was suggested that the names of all nominees in a particular category be read out before announcing who was to receive the EDNA; however, the selection panel recommended against this proposal.

Edna’s youngest daughter, Lyndall Ryan, had expressed interest in being involved in the Awards night, and accepted WEL’s invitation to present the awards this year. She was sent a copy of the supporting documentation of each award recipient. She did an excellent job with the presentations, sensitively summarising each woman’s history and achievements. On this occasion she also paid tribute to Clare Burton, who died on the 23 August, 1998.

Among the fund-raising raffle prizes in 1999 were signed copies of *Two Thirds of a Man* Edna Ryan, *Dry Dock* Cathy Cole, *Leading Women* Eva Cox, and a subscription to the Sydney Film Festival. As last year, many of the women present signed an attendance sheet in purple ink, which is in the file.

Helen Leonard prepared a press release announcing the 1999 EDNAs, which was also posted on <ausfem-polnet> WEL-*Informed* Issue 300, May 1999 features six of the Award winners on the front cover, and a report of the event by Anne Barber and Fran Wilde on p3.

THE 2000 EDNAS

"The accomplishments, energy and determination of the award winners were an inspiration."

WEL member Jenny Forster,
WEL-*Informed*, Issue 311, May 2000.

Before planning for the 2000 event got under way, the file indicates that there was a proposal from the WEL NSW Executive to promote and market the EDNA Awards, with a view to the event becoming a large and popular affair where "attendees would be queuing for tickets rather than the [organising] group having to vigorously market [both] the function and the awards." More funds were always needed for both WEL (NSW) and WEL Australia, and Sarah Maddison, NSW Co-ordinator, arranged an informal meeting with Danny Blackman, a journalist from the Department for Women, to discuss this matter.

Part of the strategy suggested was to appoint a high profile feminist to be a 'Matron' (sponsor, or chief supporter) of the EDNAs and to put her name behind the promotion; to specially invite female journalists and female politicians to nominate someone for an award, and to attend the function; to target local government groups; to consider well-known media personalities to compete the event; to send promotional material to politicians, and, with the agreement of Meredith Burgmann, to use her ERNIEs mailing list to distribute flyers.

Sarah approached Anne Summers who said she would be delighted to take on the symbolic role of Matron of the EDNAs – details needed to be worked out on what would be the duties of such a position. It was thought that approval should be sought from Eva Cox and Lyndall Ryan before taking the matter any further. This idea was not pursued, however, though Anne did speak at the 2000 EDNAs event.

Anne Barber again started the ball rolling in early January, and she met with Bobbie Burke and Fran Wilde (with Eva willing to consult if needed) to discuss details and production of the flyer and nomination form. The 2000 flyer was little changed from the previous year, with an addendum, requested by Eva, asking for financial contributions to maintain National WEL in Canberra, as it had failed to receive ongoing government funding.

The venue and the award categories remained as in 1999, although a suggestion had been made that a category be added for an Aboriginal woman. However, as all categories were open to all women, it did not seem useful to set up a specific category for which only Aboriginal (or lesbian, or young, or NESB) women could be nominated. With the addition of a plea to include supporting documentation as the "nominee may not be known to the Committee", the nomination form was also as 1999, with a closing date of 31 March.

The 2000 EDNAs Award night was held on Friday 28 April, from 6 - 8.30 pm, the Sydney Trade Union Choir participated (organised by Anna Logan, a member of both the Choir and WEL), and the cost was \$30/\$20.

Eighteen nominations were received for the 2000 EDNAs, one was received after the closing date, and only one without supporting material. This year the problem of choosing just one nominee in each category proved particularly difficult, as so many candidates were eligible, and well deserving of recognition. After much deliberation, and a decision to make a joint award for Battling, EDNAs were awarded to:

Suzanne Bellamy	Arts
Sarah Maddison	Battling
Margaret Jones	Battling
Jan Wood	Community Activism
Christine Nixon	Mentoring
Rae Frances	Workforce
Jennie George	Grand Stirrer

The nomination of Christine Nixon, then Assistant Commissioner NSW Police Service, by her co-workers (one of her nominators, fellow policewoman Helen McDermott, had received the Workforce EDNA last year), indicates that word about the EDNAs is spreading outside the usual feminist circles. Information supporting Christine's nomination told of successful recruitment campaigns she organised: one that targeted lesbian women by promising "sensible shoes"; another targeting mature age women by observing "If men can be police, how hard can it be?" It added that her female colleagues thought it was "high time she was held accountable for encouraging us!"⁷ (In 2001 Christine was appointed Chief Commissioner of the Victorian Police Service.)

The EDNAs awarded to Christine and Rae Frances and Jennie George were accepted on their behalf by their nominators. It was hoped that Jennie would be free to come to the 2001 EDNAs, but this did not eventuate.

Two issues concerned the selection panel this year – the matter of bias (for or against) a nominee, and how to treat submissions on nominees received from individuals other than the nominator and seconder. These matters were discussed confidentially and in general terms with a feminist lawyer. Her advice was to adopt the following procedures:

Regarding bias:

Members of the judging panel who feel that they may have a personal bias in regard to a nominee should declare this and refrain from commenting on that candidate.

Personal bias (for or against) does not cover situations where a panel member may have personal knowledge of the work of the nominee.

⁷ In 2001 Christine was appointed Chief Commissioner of the Victorian Police Service.

Essentially it means that a neutral observer might think that the panel member couldn't decide the matter fairly because of a close relationship or previous experience in regard to the nominee.

Regarding outside submissions:

WEL should avoid receiving submissions from outside bodies/individuals/groups regarding a nominee if that information *is not also made available to the nominee*. It is preferable that WEL return that material without passing it to the panel if it has not been brought to the attention of the nominee.

A submission had been received in relation to one of the 2000 nominees; as this information had not been made available to the nominee it was destroyed. The panel also agreed that an important criteria for the award of an EDNA was that the nominee had "made a feminist difference" in her particular area.

The Awards were again stylishly presented by Edna's daughter Lyndall, appreciative responses were made by recipients, a raffle was held, and a good time was had by all. Donations received to 'Save WEL National' were minimal.

There were purple balloons, and the traditional attendance sheet signed in purple ink by many of those present is in the file.

The names of the seven Award recipients were on the cover of *WEL-Informed*, Issue 311, May 2000, which also carried a report by Anne Barber and a piece by WEL member Jenny Forster congratulating the organisers and saying, *inter alia*:

"The accomplishments, energy and determination of the award winners were an inspiration. The feminist continuum was in evidence. From the suffragettes to WEL and Women's Liberation in the 70s to the work the winners and others have been doing since then. ... The feminist spirit was alive and kicking on Friday night and I want to say it was a knock out ..."

THE 2001 EDNAs

“... we have a Prime Minister who said recently that he couldn't find a woman suitable to be the next Governor-General – so we have to blow our own trumpet!”

Cate Turner, WEL (NSW) Convenor 2001
opening the 2001 EDNAs

Both the promotional flyer and the nomination form for the 2001 event remained much the same as in 2000, with one significant addition – along with requesting the usual biographical information and the person's general contribution, the nominators were specifically asked for details as to how the nominee had “made a feminist difference”, indicating that this now was clearly an essential criteria for the awarding of an EDNA.

Early in the year suggestions were passed on to the organising committee regarding changing the venue and providing entertainment – a comedian, a band or a singer; having a display of Edna's potholders; asking students to prepare a display featuring all nominees; and asking that some awards be presented by a practitioner in a particular area – workforce or arts, for example. These proposals were not investigated for lack of a volunteer to implement them.

The publisher of *Her Business*, a magazine for women in business, wrote in March 2001 requesting details of the recipients of the EDNAs in order that the women could be featured in the magazine. This very positive response to the Awards again indicates that they are becoming known outside usual feminist circles. The file does not record WEL's reply.

The 2001 event was held on Friday 11 May, at the UTS Cafeteria, from 6 - 8.30 pm, cost \$35/\$25. Closing date for nominations was 31 March 2001. The selecting panel remained the same.

Fifteen nominations were received for the 2001 EDNAs, and all with supporting documentation. The quality of the applications received led the panel to reconsider the procedure. Over the preceding three years panel members had become increasingly concerned about the competitive nature of choosing one nominee for each award, where it appears that if someone ‘wins’, the others in that category lose – lose out on the recognition, at least, and also in being part of the collective history/herstory of women's achievements at this time. Phyl Pollard, a member of the panel and Edna's oldest friend, thought that Edna “didn't have a competitive bone in her body” and that competition among women was the last thing she would want.

This year's nominations provided a good example of this dilemma, because there were so many who fulfilled the essential criteria of ‘making a feminist difference’. For example, there were four, possibly five, excellent nominations for an Arts EDNA. If one was selected as the ‘most worthy’, the women not

chosen would remain unacknowledged, and it is unlikely that they would accept nomination in another year – when perhaps there would be no nominations in the Arts category.

Accepting that these awards are an evolving process the panel decided to award an EDNA to all nominations which satisfied the criteria – the essential one being that the nominee had made ‘a feminist difference’ in her area of activity.

It was realised that with this course of action the list of women to receive awards might well be longer and the presentation time more lengthy; it was nevertheless agreed that as the EDNAs are fundamentally concerned with acknowledging and celebrating the activities of women who have made a feminist difference in the areas Edna cared about, it was the preferred way. Before presenting the 2001 EDNAs, Lyndall Ryan conveyed this change of procedure and the reasons for it to those present.

In welcoming WEL’s special guest for the evening, Edith Gilmour, Lyndall said it was “wonderful to recall those people who really have been very much a part of what 20th century feminism is about.” Edith had been a Teachers’ Federation member for over 40 years, a Federation Representative and Councillor for 30 years, and a long-time supporter of WEL. She (along with the Federation) had recently achieved her centenary.

Fourteen EDNAs were awarded in 2001:

Shirley Jones	Arts
Chrissie Shaw	Arts
Kathryn McConochie	Arts
Pat Richardson	Battling
Pam Johnston	Community Activism
Merle Highet	Community Activism
Erica Lewis	Government
Kristine Cruden	Government
Emma Tom	Humour
Martha Ansara	Media
Toni Modafferi	Media
Maggie Smyth	Mentoring
NSW Teachers’ Federation:	Workforce
Joyce Amery, Lyn Bovard, Margaret Douglas Jenny Drugy, Linda Freeman, Leonie Hancott, Jacki Irvine, Denise McHugh, Karen Mors, Cheryl O’Loan, Marian Platt, Megan Pursche and Marcia Skelton	
Robyn Plaister	Grand Stirrer

The only drawback with awarding fourteen EDNAs was, as anticipated, that the presentation took much more time than the hour allotted and, as the food was served at the end of the presentations, people were hungry and a little restless. It was clear that there was a need to find a way around this situation should it occur in 2002.

It was appropriate that the night Edith Gilmour was WEL's special guest, thirteen female teachers put forward for nomination by the NSW Teachers' Federation were this year's joint recipient of the EDNA Award for improving conditions for women workers, which Lyndall said was "the area of feminist change dearest to Edna's heart".

In putting forward these thirteen women for an EDNA, Maree O'Halloran, the Federation's Senior Vice-President, said they were nominated "because the final outcome of their bravery may have potential to create flow-ons for other casual workers, the majority of whom are women [and] because they demonstrated courage and fortitude in the face of their employer denying their claims and vigorously fighting the case." Maree accepted the award on their behalf.

Lyndall said that Emma Tom belongs to the new generation of feminists, and that her regular columns in *The Weekend Australian* were "bold, brave and very very funny ... [S]he challenges the dominant culture about, in particular, female body image, surely one of the most important issues for women in capitalist society today."

Since 1999 the nomination form had included the statement: "We assume you will have informed the nominee, and we would be delighted if you both could attend the Awards presentation on [date]". However, not all nominees are able to attend the event, (perhaps all are not aware of their nomination). In the case of the Humour EDNA awarded to Emma Tom this year, it was only when the nominator made enquiries of WEL that it was realised that neither she nor Emma were aware of the outcome. On being advised, Emma wrote that she was "honoured!" to be recognised, and she accepted WEL's apology and invitation to receive her award at the 2002 event; unfortunately she was out of Sydney on assignment at the time.

Often an EDNA recipient in a previous year makes a nomination in the following year. Gail Hewison a 1999 Arts recipient did this in 2000 and 2001; Jan Wood, a Community Activism recipient in 2000 nominated three women in 2001 and undertook to film the proceedings; a videotape of the 2001 event is now part of the EDNAs history (copies can be purchased from WEL). Jan wrote that "just being nominated is a validation", adding that "these Awards themselves make a huge Feminist difference".

One hundred helium filled purple balloons with silver ribbons decorated the space, and only a small number of women present signed the purple sheet. In May 2001 Gail Hewison wrote:

Many thanks for the wonderful Edna Awards evening. It was inspiring yet again to be with so many dedicated and committed women, and to honour the brilliant award winners. What talent amongst us!

A report on the 2001 Awards was published on p3, *WEL-Informed* Issue 319, May 2001.

THE 2002 EDNAS

*“ ... an award for feminist contribution!
I can't believe that even in 2002 such a thing exists! ”*

Jill Bruneau, Arts EDNA, 2002

The presentation of the 2002 EDNAs was held in the Transport Club, in Regent Street, Chippendale; the principal reason for the change of venue was that the licensing arrangements had changed at the UTS Cafeteria and they could no longer operate with a cash bar; they could serve alcohol (with the food), but would need to charge an extra \$8-10 per head. The additional cost would make tickets too expensive, and after some investigation, Anne Barber and Fran Wilde booked the Transport Club, with a cash bar, and a ticket price of \$35/25.

The flyer and the nomination form remained relatively unchanged from the previous year, still emphasising the need for details as to the activities undertaken by the nominee which had made a feminist difference. However, as no 'winner' was to be selected in any category, the words "A panel ... will make the selections" was changed in 2002 to "A panel ... will review the nominations".

Two members of the panel, which had remained constant since the inaugural EDNAs in 1998, decided to step down, and two more were recruited – Juliet Richter, who had been involved in early discussions about the EDNAs, and Gina Andrews, the current WEL (NSW) Convenor.

After dates had been set for two meetings to consider the 2002 nominations, panel members Annie Bickford, Phyl Pollard and Bobbie Burke contacted Juliet and Gina to give them some background as to how the awards were decided – specifically to let them know about the change of procedure adopted in 2001, and the reasons for the change. After discussing the matter, the new panel confirmed this course of action. A statement dated 23 April 2002 was to be read out at the event, and appears in the file:

The EDNAs review panel this year consisted of Gina Andrews, Annie Bickford, Phyl Pollard, Juliet Richter and Bobbie Burke.

We all agreed that the EDNAs are not a competition, that they were established to publicise the work and achievements of women and to encourage all of us – as Edna did – to keep contributing, to keep on making a feminist difference.

So we conformed to the procedure followed last year, to award an appropriate EDNA to all nominations which fulfilled the criteria, and so acknowledge and celebrate the extraordinary commitment and determination of these feminist women.

Remembering the time difficulties with fourteen Award presentations in 2001, the panel decided to prepare (from the supporting documentation forwarded with the nomination) a one page summary of the achievements of each recipient, to be read out before each presentation (a copy of each is in the file). With the approval of the recipient, copies of the summary would be available on the night following the presentations. It was also decided to schedule a half way 15-20 minute break.

Joan Bielski, a founding member of WEL (NSW) and recipient of a Grand Stirrer Award in 1999, wrote to the panel making several suggestions. Firstly, that as 2002 was the thirtieth anniversary of WEL, there should be two Awards for Grand Stirrer [and nominating her choices], second, that the Award for Political Potholder be discontinued, and third, that it should be replaced with an Award for Education. To support this, she said that:

Access to education is fundamental to women and girls being able to take advantage of the gains made by feminists. ... Edna Ryan lacked the formal education open to her daughters. What more would she have become if she had been accorded the same educational opportunities. Perhaps our first woman prime minister!

The panel agreed with these recommendations, and an inaugural Education Award was set up for "a significant contribution to the education of women and girls."

At the eleventh hour Lyndall Ryan was unfortunately not well enough to come to Sydney to present the EDNAs; she was extremely disappointed and sent her apologies; Anne Barber contacted Meredith Burgmann, who was able and willing to step in at short notice. Thirteen women were nominated for an EDNA (two nominations were received for the same woman), and thirteen EDNAs were awarded:

Education	Elizabeth Dawson
Government	Kathleen Swinbourne
Battling	Betty Little
Arts	Jill Bruneau
Media	Julia Baird
Mentoring	Joyce Stevens
Community Activism	Jan Roberts
Community Activism	Janne Ellen
Community Activism	Leichhardt Women's Community Health Centre
Humour	Rachael Oakes-Ash
Humour	Judy Horacek
Grand Stirrer	Wendy McCarthy
Grand Stirrer	Dorothy Simons

This year the panel had undertaken to ring each of the nominators of the Award recipients, asking them to do all they could to come to the event with their nominee and her friends, or if this was not possible to send someone to accept

the Award on their behalf. With the exception of Judy Horacek and Wendy McCarthy, all the women nominated were present to collect their EDNA, and all told of how appreciative they were of having their feminist activity recognised.

On being presented with her Arts EDNA, Jill Bruneau said:

I'm thrilled about this, I have to say that. ...an award for feminist contribution! I can't believe that, even in 2002, such a thing exists. So hats off to whoever is doing *this*.

She went on to say that the MIGHTY exhibitions she had curated of the art of single mothers seem to provide "a place to honour women who otherwise go unspoken, unheard and uncherished really ...".

Janne Ellen said that the EDNAs are really important because "... recognition by my peers is probably the most important thing in the world to me ... It is a lonely place sometimes when you are a grass roots worker... and I thank WEL for their hard work and for their honour of Edna in these Awards."

Wendy McCarthy (Grand Stirrer) was chairing a conference in Canberra that evening and sent her apologies and her daughter, Sophie, to collect her EDNA and to read her response (the full text is on the file) which concluded:

I am honoured to accept the award of 'Grand Stirrer'. I consider it a compliment. I hope that people understand that on my journey from the class room to the board room I have tried never to sell out on the principle of being inclusive. Diversity for me is a way of life not an abstract notion.

I suspect it is time to start some massive stirring again. But this time it is Sophie's generation, and they at least have the benefit of a lot of wise, old tarts to guide them.

Most unfortunately the message conveyed to the nominator of Judy Horacek did not reach her, and Judy was unaware that she had been awarded the Humour EDNA until she read the press release on <ausfem-polnet> She was extremely disappointed, saying she would have come to Sydney had she known. WEL wrote apologising that the notification process had failed in her case, and that "despite our efforts you were not present on the night to hear us all cheering you." It was resolved to clarify the way people are notified for the 2003 Awards. Judy was presented with her Award by Edna's eldest daughter, Julia Ryan, at the celebratory opening of the Constitutional Convention in Canberra in June 2002.

As in 2001, Jan Wood filmed the presentations and acceptance speeches, and this remains a valuable record of the event; copies are available for purchase from WEL (NSW).

This year there were no balloons! (and people missed them) and no purple attendance sheet! Raffle prizes were *A Wealth of Women* Alison Alexander, *Beautiful Exile* Carl Rollyson, *So Vast the Prison* Assia Djebar, *Dry Dock* and *Skin*

Deep Cathy Cole, *Wifework: What Marriage Really Means for Women* Susan Maushart, and *The Story of Jessie Street*, all donated by publishers Duffy and Snellgrove; two bottles of champagne, donated by the Balmain Cat and Fiddle Hotel, and two tickets to a 2002 production of the Sydney Theatre Company, donated by the STC.

Before concluding the evening Gina paid tribute to Helen Leonard “an instrumental and awesome feminist” who died last year. She also apologised for not having first acknowledged the Eora people as the rightful owners of the land where the event was being held.

Issue 326, May 2002 of *WEL-Informed* features Grand Stirrer Dorothy Simons on the cover, and a report of the Awards night on p6 by Anne Barber who congratulated not only the recipients of the EDNAs but, importantly, also their friends and colleagues who nominated them.

It is clear that, as Anne Barber wrote in *WEL-Informed*, Issue 311 May 2000 “...the objective of celebrating the work of feminists [is] well and truly achieved” by the annual Edna Ryan Awards. And it really is inspiring to listen to the words of the EDNA recipients captured on Jan Wood’s video recordings of the 2001 and 2002 events. No one could doubt that Edna would approve.

APPENDIX 1
COMPOSITE LIST OF AWARDS: 1998 – 2002

In the five years that the awards have been presented, the feminist activity of the following women has been acknowledged and celebrated:

Nominee	AWARDS
Peggy Hewett	ARTS 1998
Gail Hewison	ARTS 1999
Suzanne Bellamy	ARTS 2000
Kathryn McConnochie	ARTS 2001
Shirley Jones	ARTS 2001
Chrissie Shaw	ARTS 2001
Jill Bruneau	ARTS 2002
Julie Compton and Jenny Taylor	BATTLING 1998
Noreen Hewett	BATTLING 1999
Sarah Maddison	BATTLING 2000
Margaret Jones	BATTLING 2000
Pat Richardson	BATTLING 2001
Betty Little	BATTLING 2002
Kate Lavender	COMMUNITY ACTIVISM 1999
Jan Wood	COMMUNITY ACTIVISM 2000
Pam Johnston	COMMUNITY ACTIVISM 2001
Merle Hightet	COMMUNITY ACTIVISM 2001
Janne Ellen	COMMUNITY ACTIVISM 2002
Leichhardt Women's Community Health Centre	COMMUNITY ACTIVISM 2002
Jan Roberts	COMMUNITY ACTIVISM 2002
Elizabeth Dawson	EDUCATION 2002
Ann Symonds	GOVERNMENT 1998
Erica Lewis	GOVERNMENT 2001
Kristine Cruden	GOVERNMENT 2001
Kathleen Swinbourne	GOVERNMENT 2002
Eva Cox	GRAND STIRRER 1998
Joan Bielski	GRAND STIRRER 1999
Jennie George	GRAND STIRRER 2000

Robyn Plaister	GRAND STIRRER 2001
Wendy McCarthy	GRAND STIRRER 2002
Dorothy Symonds	GRAND STIRRER 2002
Meredith Burgmann	HUMOUR 1998
Emma Tom	HUMOUR 2001
Judy Horacek	HUMOUR 2002
Rachael Oakes-Ash	HUMOUR 2002
Juliet Richter	LOBBYIST 1998
Sheryle Bagwell	MEDIA 1998
Jane Gardiner	MEDIA 1999
Martha Ansara	MEDIA 2001
Toni Modafferi	MEDIA 2001
Julia Baird	MEDIA 2002
Cathy Block	MENTORING 1999
Christine Nixon	MENTORING 2000
Maggie Smyth	MENTORING 2001
Joyce Stevens	MENTORING 2002
Marlene Arditto	POLITICAL POTHOLDER 1998
Sharon Tobin	WORKFORCE 1998
Helen McDermott	WORKFORCE 1999
Rae Frances	WORKFORCE 2000
NSW Teachers' Federation	WORKFORCE 2001
Misha Schubert	YOUNG WOMAN 1998